

Water Demand Management

Policy Brief No.3

Water Demand Management for Social Justice: Women, like men, have much to offer in the management of water resources

Women and men have different interests in, and derive different benefits from, the availability, use and management of water. Research evidence is supporting the notion that involving women, along with men, in the design and management of water projects enhances the intended results of projects and contributes to the sustainability of water resources as well as to social justice.

Policymakers could benefit much from an increased understanding of the economic, political and social impediments that limit women's effective and secure access to water resources as well as the benefits that may accrue by improving women's participation in water management initiatives.

Women's pivotal role in WDM

In recent years, the countries of the MENA region have made considerable progress in designing programs and policies that take into account gender dynamics and the different roles and responsibilities of men and women in water demand management (WDM), although it has to be said that most of the progress has been made in the area of domestic water supply and sanitation.

There is evidence to show from the region that a poorly designed (WDM) strategy--intended to save water and promote equity-- could have unintended negative impacts on the health and welfare of women and their families. It could even risk not sustaining this water. Why is that? Because there is now strong evidence that women are also water managers at the household and field level and because they have indigenous knowledge and the capacity to develop coping strategies when water is in short supply or of poor quality or too expensive. For example, in the rural context of the Middle East and North Africa region, in both irrigated and rain-fed areas, women collect water from the canal for use in the inside home, for livestock and for home gardens, women are members of water users associations and make key decisions about what crops to grow, when to irrigate and how much to irrigate. Women operate pumps and other irrigation equipment and regulate water flow in the field. Women's engagement in these activities may be on the rise as the migration of men to other places in search for employment continues.

Water, poverty and gender equity

Most countries in the region have policies to tackle poverty, policies to improve water use efficiency and policies on gender equality, yet the three

issues are rarely addressed together. Specific gender provisions relating to water demand management and the role that women could play in conserving, regenerating, or managing water efficiently are rarely addressed.

Improved access to clean water, for both the urban and rural poor, creates livelihood opportunities and better health conditions that can break the cycle of poverty and contribute to gender equity.

WDM and gender justice—some recommendations

To contribute to sustainable water management and social justice, there is still a need for a more systematic effort to identify where women's and men's challenges lie and to capture their knowledge for the enhancement and development of innovative WDM strategies and tools. Below are some recommendations for policy-makers:

Some Recommendations

- When designing a project, consider key questions in the conceptualization and design phase as to how gender issues may affect and influence the project's success. For example, what are the challenges for men AND women to actively participate in water-users associations?
- Collect AND analyze gender-disaggregated data for an in-depth understanding of the contextual situation and target groups.
- Understand that the collection of gender disaggregated data is not enough to do gender analysis, which requires an understanding of gender relations in terms of roles and responsibilities in decision-

making, power relations at the household, community and policy levels.

- Document AND disseminate the evidence on gender and water issues for better water management.
- Apply gender-related indicators to improve the ability to monitor and evaluate the performance and effectiveness of project activities and integrate these learnings in future projects.

Some of the gender-related questions that policy-makers and researchers may want to ask are:

- How do entitlements, such as land, affect the rights of women and men to manage water effectively?
- How do men and women use water? Are there gender differences in water-use?
- How and when do women practice WDM? Do these practices differ from men?
- In agriculture, what management roles do women/men play in irrigated, rainfed and pastoral production systems? Are the different?
- How do women/men value water, economically and socially?
- How are the roles/responsibilities in water management different for female-headed households and male-headed households?
- Do women pay more – not only in terms of money, but also in their labour and time, for improved water demand management?
- Does the burden of water demand management fall disproportionately on women/men?
- Do mechanized WDM tools (eg. drip irrigation) hamper women's access to water management and income generating activities?
- If improved efficiency and equity means that water savings can be used for other purposes, do women benefit? If so, how?
- Is decentralizing water management leading to the participation of women in water management decision-making?
- What are the informal and indirect mechanisms that women use to increase their access to water and their influence on the use of water?
- What is the impact of water tariff structures for freshwater and treated wastewater that achieve WDM on pro-poor and gender equity objectives?

- What may be the role of extension workers in communicating WDM techniques and strategies to women farmers?
- What are women's adaptive strategies (to cope with water stress/scarcity)? Are they different to those of men's?

To access the full paper from which this policy brief was derived please visit:

http://www.idrc.ca/wadimena/ev-121557-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

WATER DEMAND MANAGEMENT MEANS...

MAKING THE MOST OF THE WATER WE HAVE

We can do that by moderating and managing the demand for fresh water.

- First, ensure fair access to sustainable water supply, as well as, responsible water use.
- Second, reduce the amount of fresh water we all use.
- Third, keep the water we all use as clean as possible.

Making the most of the water we have calls for effective policy as much as efficient technology. It means governing the demand for good quality water through policies that encourage or enforce efficient and equitable water use — either by changing the way water is used or by changing the task to use less water. Water policy can also mandate reducing the loss of quantity or quality of water as it flows, and ensuring security of supply in times of water shortage.

In short, WDM requires a new way of thinking about water: it is a strategy for social innovation, requiring that we examine not just the technical and economic issues, but also the personal and political choices leading to prudent and responsible decisions.

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